

ALTERNATIVES TO TOPPING

- Sometimes a tree must be reduced in height, such as for utility line clearance. There are recommended techniques for doing so. Small branches should be removed to their point of origin. If a large limb must be shortened, it should be pruned back to a lateral branch that is large enough to assume the terminal role. This limb should be at least one-third the diameter of the limb being removed.
- This method helps to preserve the natural form of the tree. If large cuts are involved, the tree may not be able to close over and heal the wounds. Sometimes the best solution is to remove the tree and replace it with a tree appropriate for the site.

TOPPING IS EXPENSIVE

Some hidden costs include:

- Increased maintenance costs. If the tree survives, it will likely require corrective pruning within a few years. If the tree dies it will have to be removed.
- Reduced property value. Healthy, well-maintained trees can add 10 to 20 percent to the value of a property.

TOPPING IS ILLEGAL

- City of West Fargo Ordinance 3-0209 states: It shall be unlawful as a normal practice for any person, firm, or city department to top any street tree, park tree or other tree on public property or dedicated utility easements.

Why Topping Hurts Trees

WHAT IS TOPPING?

- Topping is the indiscriminate cutting of tree branches to stubs or to lateral branches that are not large enough to assume the terminal role.
- Topping is often used to reduce the size of a tree.
- Topping is not a viable method of height reduction and does not reduce future risk. In fact, topping will increase risk in the long term.

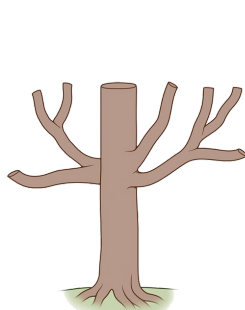
TOPPING CAN LEAD TO SUNBURN

Branches within a tree's crown produce thousands of leaves to absorb sunlight. When the leaves are removed the remaining branches are exposed to high levels of light which may result in sunburn of the tissues beneath the bark, and death of some branches.

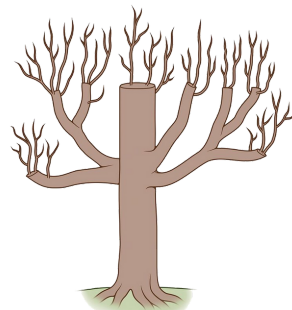
TOPPING STRESSES TREES

Topping can remove 50 to 100 percent of a tree's leaf-bearing crown. Leaves are the food factories of a tree. Removing them can starve a tree and trigger survival mechanisms. Dormant buds are activated, forcing the rapid growth of multiple shoots below each cut. The tree needs to put out a new crop of leaves as soon as possible. If the tree does not have the stored energy reserves, it will be seriously weakened and may die.

A stressed tree with large, open pruning wounds is more vulnerable to insect and disease infestations. The tree may lack energy to chemically defend wounds against invasion attracting some insects to the chemical signal that trees release.



Topped Tree



Growth After Topping

TOPPING MAKES TREES UGLY

The natural branching structure of a tree is a biological wonder. Trees form a variety of shapes and growth habits, all with the same goal of presenting their leaves to the sun. Topping removes the ends of the branches, often leaving ugly stubs. Topping destroys the natural form of a tree. Without leaves, a topped tree appears disfigured and mutilated. With leaves, it is a dense ball of foliage, lacking its simple grace. A tree that has been topped can never fully regain its natural form.

TOPPING LEADS TO DECAY

Correct pruning cuts are made just beyond the branch collar at the point of attachment. The tree is biologically equipped to close such a wound. Cuts made along a limb between lateral branches create stubs with wounds that the tree may not be able to close. The exposed wood tissues begin to decay. A tree will then begin to "wall off," or compartmentalize, the decaying tissues that can then move down through the branches. Few trees can defend the multiple severe wounds caused by topping.